



Audit Summary

Performance Audit of King County Sheriff's Office and Office of Law Enforcement Oversight

July 24, 2012
Report No. 2012-01

The audit found that the Metropolitan King County Council's efforts to establish effective oversight of law enforcement have not been fully met. The audit cited deficiencies in King County's law enforcement oversight and calls for improvements in supervision, policies and procedures, and accountability.

The report stated the reasons why the goals set by the County Council have not been reached:

- The King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) does not have a proactive culture of accountability for ensuring that investigations are thorough and follow policies and procedures.
- Departmental policies and procedures need to be updated or added to reflect best practices and comply with the expectations of the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).
- KCSO's primary accountability tools are underutilized because supervisors and commanders have not consistently entered or documented incidents. That impacted their effectiveness in improving accountability department-wide.
- The Sheriff and the department's Internal Investigation Unit (IIU) currently are not able to initiate investigations unless a citizen or sergeant/commander files a formal complaint.
- Organizational, legal, and labor barriers inhibited the implementation of the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO). These must be addressed in order to ensure that effective oversight is implemented to promote greater professionalism and public trust in King County law enforcement.

The audit report makes 16 recommendations directed to the KCSO and to OLEO for improving the effectiveness of investigations and law enforcement oversight. It also notes that the County Council recently adopted a new labor policy supporting civilian oversight of law enforcement and OLEO's authority. The audit recommends that the County Council consider incorporating features of the new policy into county code, pending the outcome of labor negotiations.

A national law enforcement consulting firm, Hillard Heintze LLC, assisted the Auditor's Office in a review of best practices for managing, investigating, and overseeing citizen-initiated and internally-generated police misconduct and use of force complaints. Hillard Heintze is comprised of former top officials from law enforcement agencies at the federal, state and local levels of government.

The audit report as well as a separate report by Hillard Heintze identified leadership and supervision issues, deficiencies in policies and procedures, and shortcomings in the accountability system in KCSO. For example, best practices indicate that many police jurisdictions have a policy that holds personnel accountable for a failure to supervise. KCSO has no such policy, and the audit recommends developing one.

Use of the department's accountability tools, chiefly the software system that contains and tracks complaint and investigation information, was found to be inconsistently utilized. The audit found that KCSO leadership has

not promoted officer and management accountability through the expectation of rigorous compliance with the department's accountability system and support of the internal investigations function.

As the audit explained, "effective accountability structures provide the platform to take in, measure, and manage officer performance information, intelligently guiding departmental policies, officer training goals, and performance reviews. Instead of merely reacting to officer misconduct through detailed investigations and discipline, such structures allow departments to proactively identify and address performance trends and issues before they develop into significant misconduct and discipline problems."

Formal responses by the Sheriff's Office and the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight are included in the final audit report. The Sheriff's Office concurred with the recommendations directed to it and is in the process of implementing the recommendations. OLEO also concurred with the recommendations.

The audit was conducted as part of the King County Auditor's Office mandate in code. [KCC 2.20.037] Ordinance 16511 mandates that the Auditor's Office report annually on performance audits of the Sheriff's Office complaint operations and the effectiveness of the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight.

Established under the King County Charter and County Code, the King County Auditor's Office is an independent agency within the legislative branch. The Auditor's Office conducts performance and financial audits and other studies.

The audit report may be downloaded from the King County Auditor's website www.kingcounty.gov/auditor. A link to a separate report prepared by the consulting firm of Hillard Heintze LLC may be found on the same website.

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